

Mc DOUGALL'S GOOD STORIES FOR CHILDREN

THE CAPTURE AND RESCUE OF THE CHILDREN'S FRIEND, THE BENEVOLENT RAMBILICUS

GUY SANSOM stood looking at the great black and red billboard on the fence with much amazement showing on his face. Peter Hughes, coming along at that instant and stopping beside him, saw that a great wonder mingled with doubt in his comrade's mind, and Peter asked: "What's the matter? Lost your marbles?" "Nope," replied Guy. "But if that billboard tells the truth, the Benevolent Rambillicus is lost; or, rather, worse, for he must be a prisoner!" "What's a Rambillicus?" demanded Peter. "Can't you read the billboard?" asked Guy, somewhat scornfully, for he thought that everybody knew old Rambillicus.

Peter read the billboard carefully. It was as follows:

*Last Two Weeks of Hankharrison's
Great Show!!!*

The Greatest Attraction on Earth!!!

*The Only
GENUINE
RAMBILICUS!*

This wonderful animal has been procured at enormous expense, and will be seen for two weeks longer before he returns to the Sharda of Gazbagh, who captured him in the wilds of Borneo!

*ADMISSION FIFTY CENTS.
CHILDREN HALF PRICE.*

"Well," exclaimed Peter, "that doesn't tell anything. I never heard of a Rambillicus!"

"He's an animal who lives in the Delectable Playgrounds," said Guy.

"Where are the Delectable Playgrounds?" asked Peter, eagerly.

000

"Away outside of town," responded Guy. "I've never been there, because I've always been pretty busy with my studies, but I know all about the place. It's filled with merry-go-rounds, swimming ponds, roller coasters, swings, baseball grounds, soda fountains and everything. Oh, it's a fine place!"

"What do they charge to let you in?" inquired Peter.

"Oh, nothing at all. The Benevolent Rambillicus invited children to come there and stay awhile, mostly during vacation; but he only asks good children, they say, and he has another animal called the Skeewink, that goes snooping 'round finding children that he thinks good enough to be asked."

"I'll bet I'll never be invited," said Peter, "for they're always saying I'm no good; but I ain't any worse than any of the kids on our street, I'll bet. What does this Rambillicus look like?"

"Something like a hippopotamus," replied Guy. "But he's different, too, for he's all fitted out with closets and places where you can get pies, cakes, pretzels and such things; besides, he has a regular soda fountain inside, and there are cups hanging along his outside. All you have to do is to turn on the kind you want and hold your cup."

"Geel! but that's bully!" cried Peter. "Tell us more."

"Couldn't tell it all in an hour," said Guy. "His toes are bananas, and when you pick one off another one comes right out in its place. But what puzzles me is how the Rambillicus came to be in a circus."

000

"I'll bet it's a humbug!" cried Peter. "It's only a fake animal, maybe a rhinoceros or a hopopontopus!"

"I guess you're right. I'd just like to go and tell Rambillicus that they're advertising that he's in a circus!" declared Guy. "If I had ten cents I'd do it this very morning."

"I've got twenty cents," said Peter. "Let's go now."

In two minutes they were on a trolley car speeding toward the Delectable Playgrounds, and in an hour they were entering the lovely and remote forest that conceals the Playgrounds from chance passersby.

Passing through it quickly, for both were very eager to behold the wonders that the Rambillicus shares with his favored children, they came out upon the grass-grown, shady plain upon which were scattered many booths, play-houses and other attractions, but the moment their eyes roved over the Playground both boys saw at once that something was wrong.

Everything was almost in ruins, and showed that nothing had been done to preserve from the ravages of the wind and rain the beautiful things that lay about in the greatest profusion.

Here they saw scattered on the ground the finest toys; there, amid the tall grass, lay dolls, bats, cameras, swords and drums, while broken wagons and bicycles, torn picture-books and shattered musical instruments gave evidence that a long time had passed since the children had been here. Fragments of mouldy cake and pieces of half-dissolved candy showed in the grass, while all about roved curious



The Skeewink Wept
When He Heard
the News

"It Can't Be
Rambillicus!" the
Little Animal Cried

snail-like creatures white as snow.

"What on earth are these things?" cried Peter, in astonishment.

"Oh, I remember them," replied Guy, after a moment's thought. "I read about them. They are the Hornswoggles. The Rambillicus feeds on them, or, rather, he licks the sugar off them. You see, they are called sugar-coated Hornswoggles, and it comes on them all the time, somehow."

"Is that all he had to eat?" asked Peter. "And yet he's as big as a rhinoceros?"

"That's all I ever heard of him eating," responded Guy. "Maybe he eats other things, but the book did not say so. Let's go on and see what else there is around here."

They moved on amid the ruins of former good times, but saw nothing living, and nothing in better condition anywhere. Finally, just as they were about to return in disgust and disappointment, they heard a voice, and, turning quickly, saw a marvelous animal that was like a huge raccoon approaching and calling to them. It said, with a tearful snuffle:

"Don't leave, children. Pray, remain with me! You're the first I've seen for many a day!"

"That's the Skeewink!" whispered Guy. "He's the one I told you about!"

"Will he do anything to us?" asked Peter, looking about for a big stone.

000

"I wouldn't harm you if I could!" declared the Skeewink, as he came up to them. "I am so lonely that the sight of you made me stop crying for the first time since the dear old Rambillicus went away!"

"What!" shouted both boys together, "has the Rambillicus gone?"

"Yes; he's been absent for eleven months," replied the Skeewink, tears dripping from his whiskers and falling with dismal splashes to the ground. "I have been watering the plants with my weeping ever since. Alas, he's gone, and I know not where! I am desolate and forlorn!"

"Why, then, that must be he in the circus!" shouted Guy. "Who would have thought it!"

"What! My dear old Rambillicus in a circus! Never!" asserted the Skeewink. "He hated circuses! Said they made parents tell stories when they pretended that they only went to the circuses in order to take the children! Oh no, Ram could never join a circus! He is dead, or something awful has happened to him!"

000

"Oh, he's in the circus, all right," declared Peter, stoutly. "I saw the bill, and it had his name on it a foot high."

"Then he has been captured!" cried the Skeewink, hotly. "Nothing on earth could induce Ram to forsake me and these beautiful playgrounds upon which so many years' toil was spent! He has been trapped; and yet, who could have been smart enough to trap that wise and wary old fellow?"

"Barnum could have done it, I suppose," said the wise Guy, thoughtfully; "and I suppose there are others in the business."

"This must be looked into," declared the Skeewink, "but, alas, I can't do it, for they'd nab me in a minute!"

"Sure," said Peter. "You'd be the greatest ever in a menagerie!"

"We will do it," said Guy. "I will go home and smash my glass savings-bank. There's two dollars and eight cents in it, and that's far more than

enough. Then we'll go to the circus and see if he's really there."

"Then what?" demanded Peter. "Can we get him out?"

"I hadn't thought so far as that," replied Guy. "I don't suppose two little boys could do much."

"Two boys did great deeds once!" declared the Skeewink. "They killed an awful thing that was pestering us. Maybe you two can think of some way to rescue Ram if he's really there. Oh, do try it, even if it costs twice two dollars and eight cents."

000

"Oh, the expense isn't anything," replied Guy. "We'll have to look over the ground first and think up something. Come, Peter, let us hasten and get home before dark. To-night we will go to Hankharrison's circus!"

At eight o'clock they stood at the entrance of the circus, amid an eager and excited crowd which was pushing into the lighted space before the ticket stand. Each boy had a quarter in his hand. Guy stopped and whispered:

"Soon as we get in we'll go and see the menagerie, right off. But we mustn't say or do anything that will seem suspicious!"

"Don't let's go near the Rambillicus until the crowd goes into the circus part, then we'll have the place to ourselves," said Peter.

They entered the menagerie, and, as they had expected, the crowd about the animal was so great that they could not approach the large iron-barred cage in which he was confined. But they could see his sad eyes and mournful face above the heads of the people, who were eagerly staring at him and talking excitedly about him, for, you must remember, some ten million people have read all about Rambillicus.

He appeared almost too dejected to notice the men, women and children gazing at him. Some laughed at him and made remarks about his appearance, others even threw peanut-shells at him. Sad and disheartening was the sight of hundreds of silly and shallow human beings making fun of this benevolent creature in his misery, and yet perhaps some of the children of these very men and women might have visited the playgrounds sometime and have enjoyed the rare bliss that comes to all the visitors there.

Lower and lower fell the head of the dejected Rambillicus as the throng grew greater around his cage, until finally a big tear fell on the planks beneath him. He tried to conceal his grief, but the cage was open all about and there was a wide space between each iron bar, so that all saw his misery and many actually laughed to see him weep! Happily the hour for the circus performance arrived very soon and the crowd rushed into the big tent, leaving only the two boys in the menagerie.

Guy hurried over to the cage, and, putting his head in between the iron bars, said in a low voice:

"Rambillicus! We have just come from the Skeewink!"

Rambillicus raised his head and opened his eyes in surprise.

000

"What did you say? Have you been out to the playgrounds? Have you seen Skeewink?"

"Yes, and we came in here to see if it were really you, and to see if there isn't some way of rescuing you."

"But that's impossible. This cage is far too strong. I've tested every iron bar. An elephant

couldn't bend one," replied the Rambillicus. "No, Hankharrison got me, and he will keep me here until I die."

"How on earth did he capture you?" asked Guy, in wonder, as he gazed at the huge form.

"It's a pitiful tale!" replied Rambillicus. "I was too trusting! I came to town to seek for some good children, but I happened, I fear, to get into the wrong street. The boys, and even the girls there, threw things at me, tore off my silver cups, despoiled me of everything and obliged me to flee into the woods."

"There I hid and was afraid to venture out until Mr. Hankharrison came and told me that he had built a car in which I could safely escape. He assured me that its bars were so strong that no boy could reach me, and thus he induced me to venture into this prison. I was even glad to see him shut me in, and then, with ten horses, take me back to town; and it was not until evening that I learned that I was a prisoner."

"He had trapped me for his circus, and had taken care to make the cage as strong as possible, fastening each great bar into the framework of the cage so that all my strength did not suffice to jar them. The floor is made of solid oak planks as thick as your arm! Oh, no; there's no hope for poor old Rambillicus, and I guess you'd better return and tell Skeewink to make his way to some far-away land where such ills may not befall him, also."

000

"What does he give you to eat?" asked Peter, as he noted how wasted was the form before him.

"Hay," replied Rambillicus. "Hay and turnips; think of it!"

"Well, we will bring you a lot of Hornswoggles to-morrow," replied the boy, "even if I have to crawl under the tent! There's barrels of them out in the playgrounds, and I'll bet they're just dying to have you lick the sugar off them!"

Rambillicus was speechless. He couldn't thank them, but the expression in his eyes showed exactly how he felt, and he actually smiled when Peter assured him that he thought they would find a way to rescue him.

The boys went away at last, when, after the circus performance was over, the people again began to pour into the menagerie tent to see old Rambillicus once more before leaving; and although both of them were a little bit sorry not to have seen the bare-back riders, the trapeze performers and the clown, they were too glad at the lucky chance of talking with Rambillicus to complain.

000

The next day they hastened to the Delectable Playgrounds, and meeting the Skeewink almost immediately told him what had occurred. He was overcome with a mingling of joy and grief, shed tears and turned somersaults, for he was quite convinced that, somehow, they would find a way to rescue his friend and benefactor.

"Boys are wonderful things!" said he, "wonderful! Are not boys fathers to men? All the smart men have been made by boys, you know!" he repeatedly declared, and, when you come to think of it, he was quite right. It is very certain that nearly all the great things done by men were all thought of when they were boys. In fact, I have not yet done half of the big things that I planned when I was a kid! But Guy couldn't see how they could manage to get the Children's Friend out of the great iron cage, nor even to get to him with his much prized food, the Hornswoggles.

Peter, who was a boy of great resource, although

A SAD TALE ABOUT THE WONDERFUL ANIMAL, WHICH, HOWEVER, HAS A HAPPY ENDING

not nearly as learned as his friend, had been thinking deeply, and when they had secured a big basket from the Skeewink and gathered a few hundred of the snail-like things, he said:

"I think Mr. Hankharrison will be glad to get food for the Rambillicus that when we appear with it he will give us a lot of tickets to the show; and, maybe, he'll give me a job to carry water for the elephants and things, so's I can be 'round all the time and find out some way to get Rambillicus out."

Sure enough, when they turned up with the food for his most valuable animal and told him that it was what he used to eat, Mr. Hankharrison gladly gave them a bundle of tickets and also made Peter a waterboy. Thus the first part of their scheme succeeded, and Peter was filled with delight. Rambillicus saw with much pleasure that he had been engaged to serve him, but it was a long time before they could converse with the lovely old animal.

Meantime Peter had been using his eyes, and one day he met Guy outside and whispered: "Come to the show to-night, and wait until it's over, then meet me in the menagerie. I've got a plan that'll surely work, and all I want is a big screwdriver!"

That's all he would say, and Guy was forced to be content with such scanty information until after the show, when he met Peter by the cage of old Rambillicus, when it was shown to him that his friend had indeed found a way to release the animal.

The planks on the big cage on wheels were screwed to the frame, and with the screwdriver Peter took out every screw very cleverly, Rambillicus standing impatient meanwhile and watching eagerly. It was midnight, and all except a few nocturnal animals, like the lions, tigers, hyenas and wolves, were asleep when the last screw came out; then, softly and silently, each plank was shoved from its place and laid aside.

Soon old Rambillicus was standing on the ground, although still in the cage, of course, but the great deed had been done. The rest was very easy. When all was ready Peter whispered "All right!" and Rambillicus began to walk, and he walked with a will, too.

000

When he came to the side of the tent he went through it like a cyclone, making a hole as if a railroad train had struck it, and then the boys, knowing that the noise of the tearing canvas would awaken many of the show people, jumped up on the cage, and, after that, you should have seen old Rambillicus scoot! In fact, he went so fast that you really couldn't see him at all.

People whom he passed on the street said it was a big cloud of smoke moving along in the night, with boys inside laughing and shouting: "Go it, Rambillicus!" They passed an automobile that was making forty-six miles an hour, yet it seemed as if the machine was scarcely moving! Telegraph poles went past so fast that they seemed like the teeth of a fine-tooth comb! It was only when they reached the open country, and almost at the playgrounds, that Rambillicus slowed up so that you could see the bars of the cage, and then Peter suggested that he dump the whole thing over on its side and step out.

"Why, my gracious!" exclaimed Rambillicus. "Why didn't you tell me to do that before? I needn't have lugged that heavy thing all this way! I could have tipped it over right outside of the tent!"

"You got away at full speed before I thought of it!" replied the boy. "Anyway, I think it was best, for we never could have stayed on your back when you were lighting out for home like that!"

000

"Plenty of room for you inside!" replied Rambillicus. "But it's all right. Here we are, safe at home, and if a circus man gets me again he'll be even more clever than old Hankharrison!"

They walked along in the darkness until they reached the playgrounds, and almost directly stumbled over Skeewink asleep under a gawgaw tree. When he awoke and saw Rambillicus his joy knew no bounds, but he wasn't surprised. He said: "Oh, I knew these boys were of the kind that do things! Saw it in their faces right off! Can't fool old Skeewink!"

But you should have seen the circus after the old fellow escaped! There was excitement enough for an election, and all over town people remained indoors when the news got out that the great animal had escaped.

Probably those who had thrown peanuts at him were the most afraid, but had they known the kind-hearted creature they would never have dreaded his vengeance. Instead of holding any grudges, Rambillicus went to work at once, assisted by the two lads, to put the Delectable Playgrounds in order and fit up new attractions for the children of these very people, quite likely, to enjoy next summer.

And there they are, all of them, busy as bees; for, as perhaps you know, there's never any real winter there, although there's ice in plenty on the pond for those children who like to skate. I sincerely hope that you will be invited there yourself next summer, and perhaps I will have the pleasure of meeting you there, myself.

WALT McDUGALL